

Take home some memories from a Northern Indiana tour.

By Sally Campbell Grout

What will you take away from a tour of Northern Indiana? A long-lasting keepsake, such as an antique or a piece of handcrafted furniture? A temporary treat, such as a box of wonderful chocolates? Or something intangible, such as the memory of a beautiful view, or a tip on how to improve your golf swing? No matter what you take with you, it's sure to be something you'll treasure.

“Destined to be heirloom” furniture.

Throw pillows you can change anytime. But dining tables, hutches, and bedroom suites, well, you want those to last your lifetime—and maybe get passed on to future generations. You'll find beautifully handcrafted furniture, along with plenty of other items and collectibles, at the Riegsecker Marketplace (888-447-4725) in Shipshewana in Northern Indiana's Amish Country. Before you buy, see how it's made during a Reigsecker Hardwoods Furniture Factory Tour (888-447-4725), where oak and cherry woods become beautiful cabinets and furniture.

Also located in Shipshewana, Lambright Woodworking (260-593-2721) allows you to watch craftsmen turn rough lumber into furniture and cabinets. In Middlebury, Amish Heritage Furniture (574-825-1185) is a huge showroom of solid lumber furniture in oak, cherry, pine, walnut, or quarter-sawn white oak. Here, you can also watch craftsmen at work. Weaver Furniture Barn in Nappanee (574-773-4826) features handcrafted solid oak and cherry furniture, upholstery, and other items.

An Amish Country/Elkhart County Audio Driving Tour (800-860-5949) is a great way to see even more. Two tours, the Heritage Trail and the Furniture Crafters Tour, are both interesting and informative.

Delicate handiwork.

But perhaps your idea of handmade is more “needle and thread” rather than “saw and hammer.” If so, you'll want to visit some of Northern Indiana's quilt shops and artists' areas. At Martin's Quilt Shop in Nappanee (574-831-2256), you'll find unique quilts and gifts. Here, many of the quilts are made-to-order. Quilt Designs in Goshen (574-534-5111) features original design quilts and wall hangings by fiber artist Shirley A. Shenk. The showroom and studio, which are located in an 1837 log cabin, can be found at Goshen's Old Bag Factory (574-534-2502). In this 1896 building, you'll find 20 shops, and may even get the chance to watch artists at work.

More artists are showcasing their talents at the Village at Winona (574-268-9888) in Winona Lake. In this historic restored lakeside community, you can shop year 'round for unique items by local, regional, and even national artists.

One-of-a-kind finds.

Maybe you're more interested in when something was made than how it was made. If so, you'll want to take the Antique Tour of LaPorte County (800-685-2954). In Nappanee, Borkholder Dutch Village (574-773-2828) is the nation's largest indoor crafts and antique mall. Visit on a Tuesday morning to participate in the antique auction!

You never know what you'll discover at the Shipshewana Flea Market & Auction (260-768-4129). The 1,000-vendor flea market offers a virtually endless supply of "stuff." And with an antique auction, a livestock auction, and a horse auction, you may want to be careful when you wave. (Call for dates and times.) If all that shopping leaves you famished, grab a big, hearty bite at Shipshewana's Blue Gate Restaurant & Bakery (888-447-4725). The Amish and Mennonite cuisine features daily specials and entrees, including beef and homemade noodles, deep-dish chicken pot pie, and meatloaf. Dinners are served with homemade bread, apple butter, and the Blue Gate's own Amish peanut butter spread. If you have room for desert, the Blue Gate serves 20 kinds of pie daily. (Or, get a pie to take home from the Blue Gate Bakery.)

Speaking of great food....

While Northern Indiana's Amish Country is known for hearty home cooking, you'll find plenty of other great food throughout Northern Indiana—and not all of it is in the form of a meal. Case and point: the diet-debilitating South Bend Chocolate Company Factory & Museum (574-233-2577). Appropriately located on Sample Street, the company got its start making chocolates under a license from the University of Notre Dame. And, because even rivals can agree on chocolate, the company now makes licensed chocolates for Indiana University, Purdue University, and the University of Michigan. Other tempting treats made here include gourmet truffles, premium creams, lake effect meltaways, and old-fashioned fudge. Take a tour of the factory and museum and tell your taste buds to get ready.

And while college-themed chocolates are tasty, they don't tell the story of the schools they celebrate. Learn about this history, the heroes, and the great rivalries of fall at the College Football Hall of Fame (800-440-FAME), also in South Bend. At this interactive museum, you can test your skills at kicking, blocking, and passing; try your hand at sportscasting; relive some of the game's greatest traditions; hear the words of famous coaches; recall some great bowl games, and remember the honorees.

If you're hankering for something a little heartier than candy, you might like to try a buffalo meal at the Wild Winds Buffalo Preserve in Fremont (260-495-0137). Actually, the buffalo meals are just one part of the experience at this 400-acre preserve that's dedicated to honoring and preserving the land, the buffalo, and the people. Take a tour on a seated truck or wagon, or on horseback. An overnight stay in the log-cabin style bed and breakfast lets you truly "disconnect" from everyday life; you won't find televisions, public phones, or shoes! The lodge is "smokeless and shoeless," so pack slippers.

Of course, Northern Indiana is also rich with one-of-a-kind restaurants serving more traditional meals, such as Strongbow Inn in Valparaiso (219-462-5121). This family-owned restaurant, which was established in 1940, offers chicken, veal, beef, and fresh fish, but is known for its specialty: turkey. In South Bend, Tippecanoe Place Restaurant (574-234-9577) serves American cuisine, such as roasted Indiana duckling, fresh Atlantic salmon, prime rib, and steaks, in the mansion that was once home to the Studebaker family.

To taste the food at its absolute freshest, you have to pick it yourself. You're welcome to do just that at destinations that are "Yours for the Picking in LaPorte County" (800-572-3740). Produce varies depending on when and where you stop, but you can find everything from asparagus, blueberries, and peaches to Christmas trees.

Take a picture. It lasts longer.

Perhaps your tour through Northern Indiana won't be about filling your trunk or your stomach. Maybe it will revolve around filling your photo album. Wondering where to start? The Indiana Welcome Center in Hammond (800-255-5253) can assist you with information, and is also a destination in itself. The architecture incorporates important elements of Lake County, including Lake Michigan, sand dunes, the steel industry, farms, and the Kankakee River. Inside, you'll find the W.F. Wellman Exhibit Hall, the IN-Vision Theatre, the Lake County Gift Shop, and the John Dillinger Museum.

Those dunes impact much of Northern Indiana. In Chesterton, the Indiana Dunes State Park (219-926-1952) is a great place to spread out your beach towel and dig your toes into the sand. Along with swimming and hiking, the park offers camping, playground equipment, picnic shelters, and a nature center with programs year around. The park is within the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (800-959-9174, ext. 225), where you'll also find a nature center, miles of trails, camping, a staffed visitor center, and the Bailly homestead and Chellburg Farm.

In the other “corner” of Northern Indiana, in Angola, Pokagon State Park (260-833-2012) offers a full calendar of fun. Bordering both Lake James and Snow Lake, the park offers boating, swimming, and fishing. On weekends from the day after Thanksgiving through February, take a zip down the park’s one-fourth-mile toboggan run. Speeds reach up to 35-40 miles per hour!

But before you start planning cool-weather activities, how about making the most of the time you have left on the greens? The experienced instructors at Swan Lake Resort & The United States Golf Academy in Plymouth (800-582-7539) will help you refine your skills. Enjoy unlimited access to practice facilities; a personal video golf analysis; and video and print support materials. Ready to play? Hit the nine-hole course, two 18-hole courses, or the 5-hole Executive course. Unwind at the indoor and outdoor pools, whirlpools, and sauna.

Start exploring.

To discover more great destinations in Northern Indiana, and throughout the state, visit enjoyindiana.com.